



# Supporting Diversity through the Arts

by Michele A. Gregoire and Jude Lupinetti

*For teachers working with diverse student populations, infusing the arts into the curriculum can make learning more accessible and facilitate success.*

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**T**he arts are the great equalizer in education. Regardless of native language, ability, or disability, music, art, and drama are accessible to all. Because the arts are largely nonverbal and focus on creativity, students in any classroom can participate in various satisfying ways. Further, this participation can lead to better understanding and ultimately higher levels of performance in other academic subjects that may demand well-developed abilities with language. Consequently, success in school for many students

can be supported and facilitated through an arts program that is infused throughout the curriculum by elementary, secondary, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and special-education teachers.

The breadth of diversity represented in a classroom may span multiple disabilities and various cultural and linguistic heritages. Fortunately, the arts can reach all types of students. Of the eight reasons Cornett (2003) advocated in support of integrating the arts, four have particular relevance to diverse classrooms. The first is that the arts are fundamental to all cultures and time periods and therefore provide a natural view into the social contributions and perspectives of other cultures. Three other reasons germane to the success of diverse students are: the arts are the primary forms of communication, because they are driven by emotion and passion and are based in imagination and cognition; they are avenues of achievement for students who might not otherwise be successful; and they may focus on alternative forms of assessment and evaluation.

### Infusing the Arts

What forms of the arts are notably successful in supporting the learning of language, particularly if the arts are primarily nonverbal? Perhaps the obvious art form to consider would be creative writing; however, for students with considerable limitations in language, that would not necessarily be the best place to start. An experience with a nonverbal art form—such as visual art, music, or drama—can provide a basis for developing use of language.

Because the arts permeate other core school subjects (Diket

2003), infusing the creative arts into an integrated curriculum provides natural and functional learning opportunities beyond simply learning an academic subject (Manner 2002). While the teacher initially may need to do some extra planning, the benefits for all students are quickly evident. In turn, instructing the curriculum becomes more creative and enjoyable for the teacher. A word of caution: Teachers must plan projects that involve self-expression and exploration, along with some understanding of

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arts concepts, rather than busywork activities that merely fill time (Gelineau 2004).

For at-risk students, the arts are an entry point, where students can experience success and make connections, develop strategic knowledge, and increase interest in other subject areas (Diket 2003). Students who participate in the arts learn to communicate using various symbolic systems, and these experiences support divergent and creative thinking. Writing about therapeutic concerns, Chase (2003)

shared two important results of creative arts that have implications for educators working with culturally diverse persons: first, the creative arts provide concrete experiences that can help individuals relate to others and themselves; and second, the creative arts help people appreciate the beauty and wisdom of their own cultural backgrounds.

Arts experience has been linked to a better quality of life through success in higher education, work, and civic life (Diket 2003). Even migrant education programs have recognized the importance of including the arts to maximize the success of students. Elias (2003) reported on an educational program aimed at children of migrant and seasonal farm workers in Polk County, Florida. The Davenport School of the Arts serves mainly Mexican Americans and tries to help them stay in school or go back to school by providing support services and enrichment programs that are so often missed by these children.

### Avenues for Creative Expression

To celebrate diversity and encourage discovery within an inclusive classroom where students are developing language facility, the arts are unmatched. The handmade paper project described here, which has been used in a variety of settings, provides for many avenues of creative artistic expression and understanding while students are learning and using the English language.

At Biloxi High School (Mississippi) in 1991, art and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers cooperated to use the making of handmade paper as a sheltered English project. The project was



later to become a poster display at the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) convention in Vancouver, British Columbia. The English language learners in the classes were Vietnamese, Hispanic, and Filipino; and native language instruction in the content areas was not available. Though 11 percent of the total district population was Vietnamese, the total population of speakers of English as a second language in the high school included more than 30 different native languages, which made bilingual classes or native language instruction infeasible.

The type of sheltered English instruction used at Biloxi is also known as Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). SDAIE lessons combine second language acquisition principles with elements of quality teaching that make a lesson understandable to students (Sobul as cited in Díaz-Rico and Weed 2002). Emphasis is placed on improving the English language learner's listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills through the intense study of a content area.

The SDAIE classroom has subject content and objectives identical to that of a mainstream classroom in the same discipline, but also includes language objectives and objectives to promote greater socio-cultural awareness (Díaz-Rico and Weed 2002). Though the approach may seem similar to content-based ESL instruction, SDAIE actually is the near opposite. In the content-based ESL classroom, subject-area objectives are used as the basis for the ESL lesson. In the SDAIE classroom, the content-area teacher delivers the subject-area instruction, and the ESL teacher supports the project by teaching the second

language objectives.

A popular and useful model for the delivery of SDAIE lessons was developed by the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1993. The model initially focused on the content, connections, comprehensibility, and interactions taking place during the lesson. Later, the model was modified to include a teacher attitude component, because observations showed that teachers who were otherwise technically proficient could not make the lessons successful unless they could establish a high degree of trust and rapport in the classroom (Díaz-Rico and Weed 2002).

### Art and Language Objectives

The key idea behind the Biloxi project was to demonstrate, through the making of handmade paper, how art is created from found materials or from materials available to any culture at a given time or place (see page 163 for paper-making instructions). The art teachers developed the content objectives that included, for example, exploring nature to learn how found objects and recycled materials could be turned into works of art. Objectives included extending those observations to learn how various cultures, particularly those represented by the students in the class, viewed such objects of art. The job of the ESL teacher was to take the art objectives and craft language objectives that matched and supported them. Because the art class was not textbook based, the process involved careful examination of a variety of assigned readings as well as familiarity with lectures and demonstrations conducted by the art teachers.

Together, the teachers set up mechanisms that allowed students

to connect classroom experiences with their own personal life experiences. In this way, teachers linked new learning to old and gave students opportunities to use their language-processing skills. Both the art and ESL teachers used many support materials designed to contextualize the lessons. Teachers presented demonstrations of each phase of the paper-making process. Before students were allowed to make paper, teachers led them through a step-by-step process of familiarizing them with the materials used in the recycling process.

After seeing, touching, holding, and otherwise examining materials, such as molds and deckles, teachers presented students with piles of found materials. Among these were discarded picture frames, cheesecloth, pieces of wire screen, fishnets, and other items students or teachers brought from home. Students were assigned the task of making their own molds and deckles from whatever was available to them that day. ESL support consisted of language exercises designed to allow dialogue, use vocabulary in context, write about their experience in the form of short journal entries, and read one another's journals, thereby starting the process over again with more dialogue, and so forth.

For several weeks before making paper, the class saved waste-paper to ensure that an adequate supply of pulp for making their art would be available. Students furnished many prized papers, such as colorful wrapping papers, bits of construction paper, art papers, old copy paper, newspaper, card stock, and even lint from clothes dryers.

Once all the preliminary steps had been completed, the materials had been gathered, and work

groups had been established, it was time for the students to make paper. The actual papermaking took place over a two-week period (the class met four days a week for 75 minutes at a time). This schedule not only allowed time for the paper to dry properly, but also gave the ESL teacher time to schedule follow-up exercises, such as story-writing and storytelling based on the recycling project and on the artworks to be created from the handmade paper.

Teachers encountered little problem in adjusting their rate of speech during the project, and all teachers were careful to enunciate clearly. Use of idiomatic speech was limited to the particular project and used in context of repeated demonstration and trial-runs by the students. Exercises in which the students had to listen to oral directions to produce a pre-designed product were used as comprehension checks. These exercises also allowed students to see some of the types of art that could be constructed from recycled paper, thus giving them ideas as to what they could create from the paper they made.

The students created many decorative sheets of writing paper; paper frames for photographs; molded papers with the shapes of keys, classroom objects, and treasured personal objects; masks, and even a lamp shade. Most were eager to describe their projects and tell why they chose that particular item for their artistic expression. Even the students most limited in English proficiency demonstrated their new knowledge verbally and through letters describing their artworks, which were included with photographs and some original art pieces in the TESOL poster session.

## Other Classroom Settings

The authors have used handmade papermaking in various classroom settings in elementary and secondary schools as well as teacher-training programs. Materials generally are inexpensive and easy to obtain. Art studios are perhaps the ideal setting for the project because they usually have running water, large sinks, and numerous work tables; but any classroom can be adapted for the project.

In 2001, teacher-training students enrolled in two courses—

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Methods of Teaching the Arts and Methods of Teaching English as a Second Language—were given the task of jointly devising SDAIE lesson plans for a regular elementary classroom with a diverse population. Over a seven-week accelerated summer term, students met in their own classrooms most of the time; but they also cooperated in outside research and planning time in which they matched their goals and objectives to the Sunshine State Standards, the Florida Accomplished Practices for Pre-

professional Teachers, and the Florida Professional Standards for Teaching English as a Second Language. During the final week of school, the two classes met jointly in the art studio and made handmade paper from recycled materials. The success of this pilot project led to its repetition and refinement in subsequent summer terms.

Conducting this project during summer sessions has several practical advantages. Class enrollment is typically smaller during the summer term. Students take fewer hours and therefore are able to devote more time to complete this type of project. Studio space generally is more available during the summer term. And, various summer school and community day-camp programs welcome volunteer support in the form of additional personnel and special programs.

In conclusion, we have found this project to be a springboard for other projects that combine the teaching of the arts and English as a second language. From this experience, students may create culturally specific art forms that enhance their understanding and appreciation of the diversity in American school settings.

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# Making Handmade Paper

Before making handmade sheets of paper from recycled materials with students, teachers should familiarize themselves with the papermaking process so they are prepared to guide students through the project with an eye toward the final artworks they will produce. The quality of the materials being recycled will determine the quality and uses of the handmade paper.

## Materials:

**Molds:** wooden frames with wire stretched across the tops

**Deckles:** wooden frames without wire, matched in size to the molds

**Vats:** dishpans or other square or rectangular containers large enough to accommodate the mold and deckles

**Electric blenders:** for grinding paper pulp

**Sponges:** for drawing water out of the paper

**Buckets:** to hold the water removed by sponging

**Materials for pulp:** cotton linter, construction paper, copier paper, dryer lint

**Additives for the paper:** colored threads or strings, old photographs or photographs cut from magazines, sequins, glitter, lightweight objects, food coloring

**Sizing:** glue, cornstarch, or gelatin

**Large sheets of acrylic plastic:** for drying the sheets of paper

**Mops and rags:** for cleanup

## Organizational Tips:

- Have students do the preparation work. They can tear paper and linters at various times during the day or at home.
- Presoak the pulp and keep it wet in plastic containers.
- Grind pulp at home or at assigned times prior to the papermaking day. Pulp will keep for a long time in plastic containers in the refrigerator. Squeeze unused pulp into balls, removing most of the water, and freeze until needed.
- Assign students to work in groups, each with specific responsibilities. Make a duty roster.
- Schedule more than one papermaking session to allow for creative impulses and increase opportunities for English-language use.
- Safety note: Be sure to keep the area around the electric blender dry.

## Directions:

1. Tear papers to be recycled into small squares. Tearing—rather than cutting or shredding—leaves ragged, uneven edges that absorb water quickly.
2. Sort shredded papers by type of pulp you wish to make. For example, one batch might consist of red and orange papers of any mixed fiber content. Another batch might consist of white copier papers with cotton linters and bits of blue copier paper.
3. Add linters.
4. Pour about 2 cups of water into the blender and add torn paper a small amount at a time. Grind at a low speed first,

increasing speed as needed. Be careful not to overheat the blender.

5. Pour the ground pulp into one of the vats. Vats should be filled to approximately 2" below the top.
6. Repeat as necessary to fill all the available vats.
7. Each student or work group should have a vat, a mold and deckle, a sponge, one or more pieces of acrylic plastic, a bucket for wastewater, access to additive or decorative materials, and sufficient table space for the sheet of acrylic plastic to lie flat.
8. Make stools available for students who have trouble standing in place for long periods of time.
9. Dip the mold into the water and lift straight up. Paper dipped without a deckle will have uneven edges. Paper dipped with the mold and deckle will have straight edges.
10. Remove the deckle.
11. Quickly turn the mold over and place it on the acrylic plastic. Use the sponge to absorb as much water as possible from paper before lifting the mold off of the acrylic plastic. Paper will adhere to the acrylic plastic.
12. Work extra decorations into the wet sheet of paper.
13. When the acrylic plastic is covered with sheets of wet paper, place it in a dry, sunny area. Depending on the humidity level, drying time will take a few hours to several days. Good ventilation is a must to avoid the formation of mold.
14. Pieces of wet paper may be overlapped to form a collage effect or to create a single, large sheet of paper.
15. Clean up with mops and dry rags when finished making paper sheets.
16. Wash the molds and deckles and dry them thoroughly with a soft cloth to avoid rusting.
17. Clean blenders and all other materials thoroughly. Place unused materials in appropriate storage containers.
18. When the paper is dry, gently lift the corner of a sheet with your finger or by sliding a file or other thin metal object under an edge. Paper will lift off easily.
19. Don't forget to clean the acrylic plastic sheets. Store them properly so that they do not get scratched, nicked, or broken.
20. Continue with the next phase of your lesson plans for the content and language objectives.

Once students have completed the projects, display their art in the classroom and other parts of the school. Add digital photographs of the project to the class or school Web site. Invite parents to view the projects and hear their children describe the process and tell what they learned.